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REMARKS

MADE BY

MR. WILKINS, AT A SOCIAL MEETING,

MARCH 8, 1855.

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REMARKS.

INASMUCH as we are not to have a concert this evening, I have thought it a suitable occasion to call the attention of the Society to some matters which appear to me to require serious consideration. In doing this I hope I shall not be deemed to have overstepped the bounds of propriety ; and it seems to me that we are all suffering, collectively and individually, for the want of having them openly and freely discussed.

I suppose I hardly need to feel hesitancy in stating that there is, and has long been among us, a feeling of discontent,—a feeling of dissatisfaction, sometimes originating in specific causes, and sometimes attributable to no tangible cause ; sometimes, I doubt not, with some good reason, and at other times, I doubt not, with very little or no reason. And will it not be well for us to pause and look at the subject, and endeavor to remedy it when practicable ?

The occasions in which the manifestation of this discontent comes to me and to others, are when we attempt to raise money. It is now nearly ten years since we erected our church ; and as the rents of the pews would be very high, if we relied upon them to meet all our expenses, it was, at the outset, deemed to be good policy to raise a portion of the necessary funds annually by subscription. Something over \$1,000 per annum has been raised in this way, and, with

one exception, I think, it has been done annually. I do not remember whether this was done at first by the members of the committee, or whether they employed a person to present the subscription book to individuals. But for several years past, the members of the standing committee have divided the labor, taking off a list of individuals for each member to call upon. We have recently undertaken to take up a subscription to meet the deficiencies of last year. But such has been our experience of the grudging spirit, if not entire refusal, of contributing, in years past, that it is a duty extremely unpleasant to discharge. We would not imply that this spirit is universal, for there are many exceptions, and some persons are very generous. But there are many who do not seem to feel any obligation to contribute, and excuse themselves by venting dissatisfaction with the doings of the Society. What they regard as the unreasonable cost of building the church, is not unfrequently the reason of a refusal to contribute; with the remark that those who built the church might pay for it, or words equivalent.

Now I, for one, want to look this matter in the face, and to see if it is not time for such feelings and sentiments to die out and be buried.

When we contemplated erecting a church, a spirit of liberality was manifest among us; and a subscription was immediately raised which fully justified the undertaking. As the enterprise made progress, the project of erecting a more expensive and more elegant building than was originally contemplated came up, and the committee were divided in opinion respecting it. I, for one, was very decided to adhere to our original plan, and to erect a cheap house. One or two more agreed with me; but the majority were against me, and in favor of the more expensive and elegant structure. I felt much disturbed, and took but little part in the matter afterwards; and when the civil society, or pew owners, organized, I declined to serve on the committee. I state these things to show, that, whatever may have been the fault of the building committee in this respect, none of the blame attaches

to me, nor to some others of the committee who now have the responsibility of conducting the affairs of the proprietors. I will add further, that three of the building committee, who were most in favor of the more expensive project, have gone to their account, and are not here to share in the blame cast upon their doings. I refer to Mr. Wm. Parsons, Mr. R. B. Carter, and Mr. Caleb Reed. So that, whatever cause there might have been, originally, for dissatisfaction, and however aggrieved persons might have been at the time, at the doings of their agents, is it not time, now that the principals have gone to their rest, to dismiss all hard and personal feeling, and to come up manfully and do the duty of sustaining the Society in its uses? It seems to me so. And I will state some reasons which operated on my mind long ago to reconcile me to that course.

In the first place, I would state that though more money was spent than was originally contemplated, and more than under the circumstances was deemed by me judicious, *there was none squandered*. For every dollar paid out its full equivalent in materials or labor was received. Then, *there was no failure in obtaining the object sought for*. A beautiful and attractive structure was aimed at, and an eminently beautiful and attractive structure was obtained. The purpose and object of the majority of committee were carried out in a very successful manner. Nothing, then, cost more than it was worth, if we were able and willing to fully appreciate its worth. It seems, therefore, to be the part of wisdom to submit to what cannot be helped, and to cultivate a proper appreciation of what must be acknowledged to be highly beautiful and in good taste, and therefore capable of being useful.

In the second place, I am far from being sure that, as a piece of property, or as merchandise, that may some day, for some cause, come into market, this building is not worth more in proportion to its cost, on the plan adopted, than it would be had the cheaper plan been selected.

And in the last place, I considered, and would ask all

others to consider, whether, if the church were paid for, and the society were out of debt, they would feel any regret for the expenditure that had been made. I apprehend all, or nearly every one, would feel entirely satisfied with the expenditures under such circumstances; and I apprehend that nothing but the most urgent necessity would induce any one to part with the building.

The cold and lifeless feeling in regard to this matter has not only been felt in our efforts to raise funds for current expenses, but it has been felt in the neglect to purchase pews. About one half the pews were subscribed for before the church was built, and were taken when it was finished. Probably not half a dozen have been sold since — in nearly ten long years. Now why should this state of feeling be allowed any longer to exist, and hang upon the neck of the corporation like a mill-stone? Honestly speaking, according to appearance, it is but the work of a moment to point out nearly, or quite, a dozen persons who ought to own pews; and who, if they congregated in an old orthodox church, would, beyond reasonable doubt, do so. And there are some pew holders whose circumstances have so improved in the ten years that they might, with becoming grace, perhaps, change their former cheap pews for new and more expensive ones.

If all the pews were sold, all our expenses would be met with our present rate of taxes, and our debt would be paid. So that, in buying and occupying a pew, a person contributes to the advantage of the Society in two ways: — 1st, He enables the Society to pay its debts; and 2d, he diminishes the amount to be raised annually by subscription.

Is it not a duty imperative, then, upon all who unite with us in worship, to consider this matter in the light of conscience; and not only to pay justly and liberally towards making up deficiencies, but also to purchase and occupy a pew, and assume a full share of the responsibility of our legal ultimate association?

Within the last half dozen years or so, the circumstances of our pastor have changed in several respects. In the first

place, his health has been, and still is, impaired. For a considerable portion of the time, he has performed no pastoral duty; and at other times, the amount has greatly varied. In the second place, his pecuniary circumstances have greatly changed, and he is placed in a position greatly more free from dependence upon the salary or compensation he may receive for his services. At the time he contemplated a voyage to Europe, he signified a disposition to retire from all official duty, and to relinquish all compensation. The society, however, did not accede to his proposal; and it was arranged that he should retain his office, and perform some duty or not, according to his ability, and receive half his established salary, or \$1,000. Now, the fact that for a considerably long time Mr. Worcester was absent, and after his return, was able to do but little duty, taken in connection with his comparatively independent position, has induced some of our society to forbear subscribing with any degree of liberality, to meet our deficiencies. One person declined to subscribe on the ground that Mr. Worcester was richer than he was, and was as able to preach for nothing as he was to pay for it; or words to that effect. And it is to be feared that a similar feeling has prevailed to a considerable extent, and has embarrassed, and continues to embarrass, the committee in their efforts to raise funds. Now is it not high time that all such feelings should be quenched, and cease to exist? Mr. Worcester had a salary of \$2,000, established at the time of the organization of the pew holders, and he was expected to do all the duties of pastor. He has been, during two or three years past, relieved of pastoral duty to the extent of half the preaching; while all the other pastoral duties, and half the preaching, and the whole expense incident to the office, has fallen upon him, and he has received but half the original salary. And this has been going on while the expense of living has increased, and the salaries of many clergymen have been raised. Now this, it is quite plain, is not just and equitable; and he is not at all satisfied with the arrangement. When the former arrangement of going on upon half

salary was made, it was expected that an assistant minister would be settled, which would relieve him from nearly or quite all labor beyond what it might be convenient and agreeable to him to perform. But the practical result has been that for yielding up half the pay, he is relieved from no expense, and from no labor, except half, or about half, the preaching. And I feel fully justified in stating, that the time has come when a new arrangement on some new basis of amount of duty or of compensation, or both, must be made. Things cannot go on as they hitherto have gone. His labors and expenses must be lightened, or his compensation must be increased, or his connection with the society will be in great danger of dissolution.

As before stated, it was contemplated by the society to obtain an assistant minister, on whom should devolve the principal labor and expense incident to the pastoral office. The subject was committed to a large committee, who, after a very full and attentive consideration of the subject, reported that they did not then know any person that it was desirable to invite to take that office. Since that time, until quite recently, the matter has laid unattended to. But a few weeks ago, the subject was again agitated, and quite a general feeling was manifested in favor of proceeding, at an early day, to obtain an assistant minister. In this movement I heartily concur, and hope it will terminate successfully. But what I have to say on this subject now is, to invite the society to consider the additional burden they will thereby necessarily assume, in addition to the one they now bear, and bear, I regret to say, with apparent impatience.

In case we settle an assistant minister, I suppose we should not think of giving Mr. Worcester less than \$1,000; and we ought to give the assistant minister \$2,000. This would require, for the supply of the desk, \$3,000, or \$1,400 more than is now paid. And as our rents fall short now, say \$1,000 or \$1,200 of our expenses, there will be a deficiency, under the new order of things, of $\$1,400 + \text{say } \$1,200 = \$2,600$ per annum; to pay which some means must be

adopted. And what method shall be adopted to raise this sum, or any other that may be needed? Now, before the expense shall be incurred, I cannot doubt that it is our duty to devise some uniform, regular plan, that shall be an unfailing resort adequate to furnish the supply. Some rule, according to which pew holders and members will agree to be assessed, or some obligation by which the signers will agree to contribute specific fractions of the deficiency, or some other method to attain the object should be devised and adopted. It will not, in my judgment, be proper to rely upon an ordinary subscription paper to supply such wants, which those to whom it may be presented will feel free to treat with total disregard, or will subscribe to with the disposition to escape with as small amount as possible. There should be a rule to stand upon, or an obligation that can be relied upon, before the burden should be assumed. And I think the society had better be turning its thoughts to the matter of a method of raising funds, before proceeding any great length towards expending them.

I have thus far taken a survey only of the affairs of our own Society, in relation to the support of a pastor and the supply of the desk. There are other uses even in the Society which unquestionably ought to receive attention and care, such as the education of the children and the care of the poor. A diversity of opinion would probably be at once developed, if I should attempt to express any opinion of our specific duties in relation to these subjects; but I can hardly doubt that we should all agree that something should be done upon principle and upon system, that should prove that we were not unmindful of these great social interests.

But, besides these domestic concerns, we have to cast our eyes abroad and survey matters pertaining to other and more extended relations. The general convention has been for years identified by others with the New England societies of the New Church, and principally with the Boston society. Such has been the state of feeling, in relation to the general convention, existing at the South and West,

in years past, that the convention did not make any very efficient effort to make itself felt in the Church at large. But within a year or two past a very lively and gratifying interest in the General Convention has been awakened among distant societies, and especially in the west, and in Chicago particularly. The constitution of the convention has been altered, and its provisions in some respects liberalized. It has an executive committee, to whom the conduct of its affairs is entrusted; and it has expressed its desire and intention to enlarge the sphere of its usefulness. Up to within a year or two, the Convention has limited its operations to three subjects, viz.: To support of missionaries; 2d, To distribution of books; and 3d, To educating young men for the ministry. These objects are all of the first importance; and for their accomplishment the Boston society has contributed very sparingly. The committee have never felt free to do much, and what has been done has been done mainly by the old corporation,—a body, probably, entirely unknown to half of those who hear me. Either one of the objects named ought to have received, year by year, for the last ten years, at least, as much as has been contributed for them all. But recently the Convention has expressed its desire to undertake new duties; and many of the members of the Executive Committee are very urgent that they be undertaken without delay. These objects are the establishment of a book concern, that shall undertake the publication of the works of Swedenborg, and other New Church books, and which shall possess facilities for the sale and distribution of the same throughout the country. It is also desired that the Convention shall possess a magazine which shall be the authoritative organ of the Convention, and be, body and soul, its instrument. The New Jerusalem Magazine is now published by editors appointed by the Convention; but it is not now the property of the Convention, as it is the strong desire of some that it should be. And further, it is desired that a New Church newspaper should be established in the city of New York, which should be a medium

of such kind of intelligence and of advertising as would be interesting to all the receivers of the heavenly doctrines throughout the country, and even out of it. These projects affect the whole Church; and, if carried out, should be carried out by the contributions and patronage of the whole Church. Those of us who have been your organs in convention, and have acted as your representatives, have felt a good deal of sympathy with some of these objects; but the state of our treasury has always been such that we have been chary of the encouragement we have given, until our coolness, and apparent want of interest, to say the least, has become our reproach. I have one letter now in my pocket, and I have seen another, containing severe reproof and censure of the Boston society, for the lack of activity and want of interest manifested by them in these matters; and though I do not think the whole of the censure to be merited, yet I must plead guilty to some of what is attributed to us. To carry out all these objects of the Convention will require several thousand dollars; and with my experience of raising money among us, I, for one, do not know how to proceed to obtain the share, or any considerable portion of it, that would fairly fall to us.

Now, we do not, I suppose, realize the use of all these things. If we want a book for ourselves, or friends, we know where to get it, and go and buy it. The magazine is edited and published by our personal friends; we take it, and read it, and are edified by it. But as for newspapers, they are now already too multitudinous to be perused, and a glance must, in many, if not most cases, suffice for each and all. But not so is it in the west. In that broad expanse of human habitations, comprising the Western States, over which are scattered the embryonic elements of the New Church, the longing for a book cannot be readily satisfied. The channels of supply do not visit many regions at all; and it is important to those who there reside, that facilities for the gratification of their desires should be multiplied. So of a magazine and other periodicals. They need them as a common bond of thought, as a

means of viewing New Church subjects, spiritual or temporal, according to the character of the periodical, in a truly New Church light.

So earnest and pressing are our New Church brethren at the west, to commence and carry forward these uses, and especially the establishment of a newspaper, that there is serious reason to apprehend a breaking up of the Convention, or a great breach in its present union and harmony, if the East withholds longer its coöperation with the West.

Here, then, we are, practically slow and habitually reluctant, if not even parsimonious, in providing for meeting our own, I will not say *wants*, but absolute *engagements*. And in the second place, we are lamentably indifferent to the uses which the Convention, and also the Association, have been endeavoring to do in times past; and irresponsible to the calls of our western brethren to aid in enterprises in which they feel peculiarly interested.

Now, is it not time to mend in these matters? Can we not act in unity, on some systematic plan, and free ourselves from the imputation of injustice which continually attends us in view of our deficiencies at home; and from the charge of indifference and want of liberality in contributing to the uses of the more general church?

Although I have sympathy with the wants of our Western brethren, I would not wish to be understood as urging all their projects to the extent they press them. I think a vast amount of good may be done in ways and by means far short of those they propose. But I think we need to know their wants and their wishes, to consider them, and make such response as true charity would dictate.

We cannot plead poverty. It is true, some individuals have experienced serious reverses, and some of our leading contributors in times past have deceased, and some members residing in Brookline have assumed separate burdens; but as a collective body there can, I suppose, be no question that the means of the society are, and have been, annually increasing. Fifteen years ago, however, a greater sum of money was raised annually without an effort, than is now

raised with all our efforts. Though at that time a pew-rent was collected quarterly, yet voluntary contributions, in the form of tithes or donations, were continually being made by the members, and the treasury, it is believed, was never in a condition to allow any demand upon it to go unpaid. The payment of pew rent was not intended to be, and was not to any considerable extent regarded as a liquidation of the demands of the Church upon the ability of the members; nor should our present pew rents be so regarded. Our minds ought to be alive, I will not say to the *necessities*, but to the *conveniences*, of the Church; and we should frequently and liberally give of our means, unsolicited, to meet all that propriety may claim of us, either in relation to our body, or to other bodies of the New Church.

I can entertain little doubt that the amount of taxes paid by the members of our society to the civil authorities, is more than double, if not treble, what it was in 1840. Though I would not hold this to be an entirely reliable guide to the ability of a single person, or a collective body of persons, yet it is a proximate mode of estimating that ability; and relatively it will not lead us greatly astray.

If it be that we are not thus relatively increased in worldly goods, but that we now contribute as much as we can afford, then, it seems to me, that a scale of personal expense has been adopted among us which cannot be justified, and which is continually placing us in false positions.

In the early days of our organization, the practice of paying tithes prevailed to a considerable extent. And those who did not clearly see the principle, or were not able to conform very nearly to it, still approximated to its legitimate operation by frequent and very liberal donations. Though the practice of paying tithes gradually ceased to a considerable extent, a few have remained to this day faithful to it; and I doubt not we are daily experiencing the unction of its operation among us, feeble as it is. We hold in especial regard and esteem those who, in hard times and easy times, in penury and in plenty, have held fast to the principle, and either of

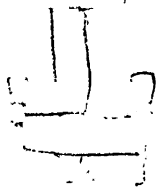
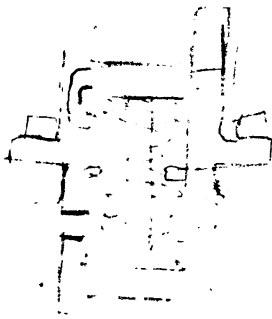
their abundance or of their living, as the case might be, have cast uniformly into the treasury. I cannot but regard this remnant of a practice, prevalent in the early day of our society, as a kind of remains, on the revival and reanimation of which, our social prosperity and safety from pecuniary difficulty and embarrassment, must in some degree depend. Let a love of the principle be cherished, and conformed to in spirit if not in the letter, every one deciding all cases of exemption from it in the court of enlightened conscience, and the reign of individual, as well as social, prosperity, will, I believe, be experienced. The windows of heaven will be opened, and blessings will descend, so that there shall not be room to receive them. Whatever of worldly goods have been bestowed upon me, it is a pleasure to believe them to have been given through the acknowledgment of that principle; and if, in the course of the Divine Providence, events shall be so ordered as to deprive me of those goods, I shall have cause to fear that I have been found an unfaithful steward in not adhering to it in practice. In the affectionate acknowledgment and practice of this principle the Society and the Church will have an anchor sure and steadfast, not of hope only, but of abundant fruition. But this subject requires much and deep consideration before its practice can be generally adopted.

Before I close I ought perhaps to allude to one other cause of discontent, which I suppose has prevailed to some extent in the society. But partaking of a personal character, I did not wish to give it prominence. I allude to the characteristic *conservative* doings of the Church Committee. I am aware that many persons have manifested eagerness for action and demonstration, and impatience of the spirit of examination and investigation, and perhaps retardation, with which suggestions and projects have been received and treated by the Church Committee. Mr. Caleb Reed has, for many years, been at the head of this committee; and it is needless to say how great his influence has been in that position; and I fear that his loss will be severely felt in the

future progress of our Society. It is difficult, indeed, impossible, to know how much of the real prosperity and true progress of the Society is attributable to his *conservative* leadings.

After his decease, the Committee proposed to the Church to have their number increased, with a view of having an infusion of new material; and that a younger class of persons might come in and share the labor and responsibility of leading in the management of our affairs. This new committee has hardly yet got into working order, and any judgment might be erroneous which should be formed of its progressive character. It may be, that some of us have formed such habits of caution and conservatism, and practised them so long, that it may be difficult, or even impossible, to change them, so as to become pliable to the impulses of the more ardent and less experienced of our members. If this be the case, I can assure my brethren that, so far as I am concerned, the day will be to me a happy one when they will relieve me from service on the committee, and supply my place with one more able to meet and embody their nascent purposes and efforts; and to guide and direct them to a successful ultimation. And in this respect, I doubt not, that some others, who have served a long time, would sympathize with me in the joy of a release for themselves.

What I have now said has been very hastily prepared. Crude as the remarks are, I hope they may not be unacceptable to the hearers; and that each one will take whatever admonition is adapted to him, and no more; and believe that I am quite as ready to take blame upon myself for the present state of matters, as to cast it upon others.





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